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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: NOVEMBER 21 GOMA UPDATE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Following report was submitted November 21 by Political Counselor David Brown, currently on TDY in Goma. (Note: Brown was accompanied by Jay Nash and Victor Bushamuku of OFDA during some of the events covered by this report.

End note.)

Rushuru attack

¶1. (SBU) Unfounded claims were received from both government and Nkunda about CNDP occupying Rutshuru. Some may make their way into the international press. As noted in separate conversations with embassy, such claims would appear to be false. While in Rutshuru with a WFP/OFDA/UK team (including Jay Nash, Victor Bushamuku and a UK embassy poloff) earlier today RPG round being shot off and some scattered firing of automatic weapons in early afternoon were heard while at the MONUC base north of town.

¶2. (SBU) School children were seen running away from the town at the sound of the firing, but within 90 minutes the foot traffic along the roads had reversed in the direction of the town all appeared much the same as it had when visiting the IDP camp in the town center two hours earlier. A clash of some kind -- which may or may not have been connected with another episode of shooting reported to us as taking place in the early morning hours - appears to have taken place, but if it involved extensive action it occurred away from the town center and was of limited duration.

LRA defectors

¶3. (SBU) LRA defectors made contact with MONUC last week in an apparent attempt to arrange the surrender of as many as 300 members and dependents. However, a press leak of the news in Uganda may have spooked the defectors. Despite repeated attempts, MONUC has been unable to re-establish contact with the supposed representatives. MONUC has contingency plans in place to extract the defectors should they re-establish contact or show up at its base in Dungu.

¶4. (SBU) The post administrator of Kiliwe in Orientale province called MONUC-Bunia on or about November 13 to report he had been contacted by two supposed LRA members apparently attempting to arrange surrender. At face-to-face meetings beginning several days later at MONUC's forward operating base in Dungu, the emissaries proposed a surrender en masse of some 30 people. However, only three members appeared at the designated rendez-vous point November 17, and proposed instead making plans for the surrender of 300 LRA members and dependents.

¶15. (SBU) MONUC flew the three to its Bunia office, where they panicked when learning the Ugandan press had reported the planned surrender of 30 LRA members. Two of the three flew back to Dungu November 19 to consult with the others. They had agreed to arrangements for contact via satellite phone November 20 and 21, but the telephone was switched off when MONUC attempted to call.

¶16. (SBU) MONUC is continuing its attempts to reach the supposed defectors. It also provided them with a cell phone and Vodacom account, but they remain out of range. However, the third defector remains with MONUC at Bunia. MONUC has reinforced the company deployed at its Dungu base in anticipation of possible mass surrender. With a limited number of helicopters available, evacuation of as many as 300 people could take several days, so it has also pre-positioned tents, food and other supplies at both Dungu and Bunia. MONUC's DDRRR extraction team is standing by in Bunia.

¶17. (SBU) MONUC is prepared for two possible outcomes: if the press leaks have indeed spooked the defectors, it will monitor the situation and accommodate individuals who may arrive. If they show up en masse, it will activate its evacuation plans. MONUC emphasizes the need for discretion until any surrender takes place.

GARVELINK